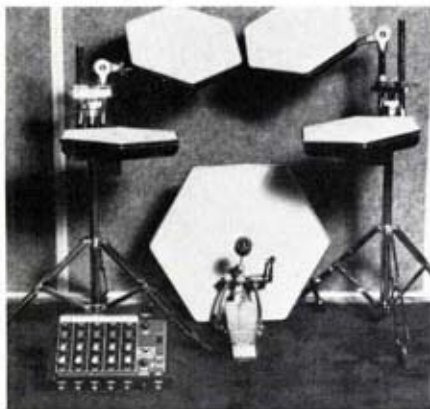


Electronic Kits Part 2

Gretsch Blackhawk



Yet another major drum company getting into the electronic rage is Gretsch. The *Blackhawk* kit has five six-sided, hard-shelled pads, plus an AC-powered control board. The pad playing surfaces

have a softened, textured feel, and give a little when struck. They have dynamic sensitivity from their edge to their center.

The mounting brackets on the pads have a 7/8" hole and a split clamp design. Each bracket is attached to a right-angle metal plate underneath the pad shell. The plate is closed off, so the arm can only go as far as the depth of the bracket. An XLR jack is located at the bottom center of each pad shell.

Gretsch includes two stands with the *Blackhawk* kit, which have double-braced tripods with a memory lock at the height joints. Atop each stand is a plate which allows the tubular arms to pass through. These arms have ratchet angle adjustment, and have memory locks as well. Sometimes these memory locks interfere with the stand's height post. Also, when mounting an arm upside down in the stand, it seems that the plate is not wide enough; the arm

gets hung up at certain directions. The stands are sturdy though, and have a good height range. The bass drum pad has real spurs mounted onto the front of the pad. Angle of the spurs can be adjusted via a ratchet, and the spur tips can be easily converted from rubber to spike point. A large steel plate with rubber spacer block is at the bottom of the pad for pedal mounting.

The *Blackhawk* control board resembles a small club mixer, and has color-coded dials at each channel for volume, decay, pitch, bend (up or down), and noise/tone balance. There is also a master volume control, and a headphone level control. The rear of the board has separate channel outputs, using 1/4" jacks, as well as a master mix output, also using a 1/4" jack. (Since the separate pad outputs would probably be going to a mixing board, I would think it might be more sensible to have XLR jacks instead.) Each pad input

Ultimate Percussion UP-5



Practically unknown in the States, Ultimate Percussion (formerly M & A) of England has been working with electronic drums for the past seven years. Their new kit, the *UP-5*, is yet another contender in the electronic drum market.

The *UP-5* is a five-piece kit, utilizing black, triangular-shaped pads with tough rubber surfaces. The pads are small—comparable to the space of a 10" head, and have plastic shell bottoms. The tom-tom and snare pads feature internal mounting

brackets. Any standard L-arm will locate into a hole on the side of the shell. The arm is then secured by a drumkey-operated screw which is recessed in the top of the pad. The bass drum spurs have the same style system, and resemble long L-shaped cymbal arms, knurled at their point of intrusion into the pad shell. A large plate at the bottom is used for pedal mounting. This platform also has two stabilizing spurs. All the pads have XLR jacks on their sides for cable connection.

The *UP-5* control module can be rack-mounted, and measures approximately 18" wide by 2" high. The only controls on the front of the brain are for individual and master volumes, along with three push buttons for sound variations. Ultimate Percussion calls this "Preset Parameter Selection." Using different combinations of the push buttons allows the player to have eight different-sounding drumkits at his or her immediate disposal.

The first button is labeled Decay, and offers a choice between a short, tight sound or a longer, more electronic sound. The Noise button adds filtered white noise to the toms and bass drum. (The snare already contains noise from a separate filter, and is unaffected by this control.) The Pitch button raises all sounds upward in pitch when pressed in. The internal electronics in the brain is already optimized for each different sound, as is pad sensitivity (not adjustable), which affects both vol-

ume level and pitch. This minimalistic approach to the sound controls certainly saves the player a lot of work when setting up a sound!

The pad inputs on the back of the module are all 1/4" jacks. There is also a switch for mono or stereo output (while in stereo mode, the drums are pre-panned), and the output jack can be used for either a P.A., amplifier, or headphones.

The *UP-5* sounds approach acoustic, studio-treated drums, rather than electronic ones (although with the proper push-button combinations, you can get them). The bass drum has incredible punch, and sounds fatter and more natural than most of the other electronic kits. The three toms can be switched from a close-miked, studio-type sound, all the way through to Simmons-type sounds. With the short decay, the snare drum can give a real heavy backbeat, and has the right amount of impact for all its eight sounds. All of the kit's variations are extremely usable.

I am very impressed with the *UP-5*'s capability to create good "studio-sound" drums by its ease of sound setup and, even more, by its price of only \$995.00. I believe Ultimate Percussion can have a great future in the drum world; you really must hear it to believe it. The *UP-5* is being marketed in the USA by Chas. Alden. Premier or Alden stands are available at \$120 and \$50 each, respectively.

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

uses an XLR jack, and there is also a 1/4" headphone jack on the front of the board.

The *Blackhawk* can produce only one user-controlled sound per pad. There is no memory available to store sounds for recall. Thus, it would take some experimentation to come up with the precise sound you want. The drums are more electronic-sounding than the other kits tested here. The bass drum is capable of a big, powerful sound, but the other drums come too close to Syndrum-type sounds, especially the toms. They seem to lack the characteristic punch needed for a solid, drum-like sound. I personally wouldn't recommend the *Blackhawk* to be your sole drumkit, but it could easily be used to supplement an acoustic drumkit. The Gretsch *Blackhawk* is available with black or red shells, and retails at \$1,099.00, complete with stands and cables.

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